

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESS REPORTS DENY POSSIBLE COTOPAXI ERUPTION

REF: QUITO 9167 (NOTAL)

1. BOTH MAJOR QUITO DAILIES, EL COMERCIO AND EL TIEMPO, HAVE NOW CARRIED ARTICLES QUOTING THE DIRECTOR OF THE GOE OFFICE OF CIVIL DEFENSE AS "DISCARDING" THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ERUPTION OF COTOPAXI VOLCANO. THEY ALSO REPORTED A REQUEST FOR AID SCIENTISTS WHO WOULD ASSIST IN RESEARCH "TO ESTABLISH ANY TYPE OF ACTIVITY THAT MAY EXIST.
"

2. THE STATEMENT BY COL. JORGE ESPINOSA CAME AFTER DAYS OF WIDE-SPREAD RUMORS, SOME OF THEM APPEARING IN THE PRESS, THAT AN ERUPTION WAS IMMINENT AND THAT NASA PERSONNEL AT THE TRACKING STATION NEARBY HAD BEEN EVACUATED. IT WAS OBVIOUSLY MEANT TO ALLAY THE FEARS GROWING FROM THE RUMORS, BUT IN DOING SO CONTRADICTED FACTS AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY ON CONTINUING VOLCANIC ACTIVITY.

3. EL TIEMPO CARRIED AN EDITORIAL EARLIER BLAMING NASA FOR NOT REVEALING ANY POSSIBLE STUDIES. THE EMBASSY INFORMATION OFFICER CALLED THE MANAGING EDITOR AND SUGGESTED THE

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NEWSPAPER CONTACT COL. ESPINOSA, AND SEVERAL DAYS LATER

ON DEC. 17 THE PAGE ONE ARTICLE APPEARED, HEADLINED "ERUPTION OF COTOPAXI VOLCANO DISCARDED," ACCOMPANIED BY A PHOTO OF THE VOLCANO. THE ARTICLE SAID ESPINOSA, UPON HEARING THE RUMORS, "IMMEDIATELY ASKED VARIOUS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS TO COLLABORATE IN THE RESPECTIVE STUDIES THAT WOULD PERMIT DETERMINING ANY ABNORMALITY IN THE CRATER OF THE VOLCANO," AND CITED THE NATIONAL POLYTECHNICAL UNIVERSITY, THE NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF GEOLOGY AND MINES, AND THE QUITO ASTRONOMY OBSERVATORY. THE RESULT, THE ARTICLE SAID, WAS NOT EVEN A MINIMAL MOVEMENT IN COTOPAXI. THERE HAS BEEN NO THAWING OR SPECIFIC SYMPTOMS DURING THE INVESTIGATION, IT SAID, BUT RESEARCH WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL ALL DOUBTS ARE CLEARED UP.

4. THE EL COMERCIO ARTICLE APPEARED A DAY LATER, ON PAGE 13, HEADLINED "SCIENTISTS DISCARD POSSIBLE ERUPTION OF COTOPAXI VOLCANO." IT TOOK ESSENTIALLY THE SAME LINE AS THE EL TIEMPO ESPINOSA INTERVIEW, BUT ADDED AT THE END, "THERE IS NO REASON FOR ALARM FOR THE TOWNS NEAR COTOPAXI," BUT THAT RESEARCH WOULD CONTINUE. "IN THE SCIENTIFIC FIELD THERE IS NO ONE HUNDRED PERCENT PREDICTION, SINCE THE INTERNAL CONDITIONS ARE UNKNOWN THAT COULD, AT ANY TIME AND WITH NO PREVIOUS SYMPTOM, PRODUCE ERUPTIONS OF ANY OF THE VOLCANOES."

5. COMMENT: THE ARTICLES CONTAIN THE FIRST OFFICIAL GOE STATEMENT REGARDING THE COTOPAXI SITUATION, AND SERVE BOTH TO EASE THE RAMPANT RUMORS AND TO GET THE EMBASSY AND NASA OFF THE HOOK AS FAR AS DENYING THEM. WE INTEND TO LEAVE TO CIVIL DEFENSE ANY PUBLICITY ABOUT ERUPTION PREDICTION SPECIALIST AND EXPERT IN CATASTROPHIC MELTING WHO HAVE BEEN REQUESTED UNDER AUTHORITY AMBASSADOR'S DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE.
BREWSTER

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